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WHAT IDEALS DO WE WISH TO PRESERVE?

BY CORNELIA J. CANNON

LINCOLN once said that God loved the common man and showed it by creating so many of them. But the biologists, observing the custodians of the fleeting civilization of the day, feel there may have been an over-enthusiasm in the production of the lower grades of humanity which will bring such civilization as there is to disaster by allowing the world to be repeopled with stone-age individuals. In such a contingency mankind would have to groan through long processes of transmutation, geological eras of fluctuation up and down the scale of development, to chance again upon the level of to-day before they could advance further in the conquest of their environment and in the diverse expressions of their inner capacities.

Civilization seems to be a plant that dies easily at the top. The further the developing parts extend from the root, though they may be by just so much nearer the light, the less vigorous and capable of regeneration they seem to be. There are indeed suspicions that there exist definite limitations to the intellectual development of man, limitations which have been reached in each successive civilization which has passed into the limbo of forgotten things and which give us small hope that history can do more than repeat herself. But since man has been so bold in his interference with the workings of natural law, so persistent in his attacks on the inimical forces of nature, so unremitting in his war upon disease we are tempted to ask his twentieth century representative whether he at last is not to succeed in arresting the downfall of the civilization of which he is a part. His best capacities will surely rise to the challenge. He cannot allow America to go the way of Greece and Rome if there is anywhere within the reach of man an antidote for racial decay.

The first difficulty that confronts the savior of a threatened civilization is the disconcerting fact that the men of the more evolved types, those capable of understanding, originating and grappling with new aspects of the conquest of nature, leave few or no descendants, while the simpler types of humanity, incapable of dealing with the complexities of modern society save in subordinate activities as followers, leave large numbers of descendants of the same intellectual calibre as themselves. Of course the obvious first step is the bringing of every possible social pressure to bear upon the carriers of our better racial strains at least to perpetuate themselves. An advocacy of the segregation of the unfit and a reduced production of the less desirable types are, of course, inevitable corollaries.

Is there not, however, in lieu of the problematic success of any such programme, a possibility of so formulating and codifying the principles on which our civilization has been built up that they may be carried along as the great, determining race-tradition irrespective of the intellectual powers of the particular bearers of the racial heritage?

We have not necessarily any interest in modern industrial and social developments as such. Complex international relations, inventions, elaborations of life that require a high order of ability for their administration, are not in themselves desirable. A return to simpler methods of living, to a self-sufficing community life, would not seem a step backward, might indeed seem a very long step forward, if we could take into that less complicated environment the ideals and standards that are basic to a noble civilization. Any material conditions which give opportunity for the full development of such abilities as we have, which makes us better servants of the common good, is acceptable to the champion of democratic ideals. But there must somehow be passed on to each generation, to the brilliant and the dull alike, in a complex or a simple society, the ideals by which to live, lest the flame of the great racial tradition die down.

Homogeneous nations like the Scandinavian, the French, the English, do not need to formulate or teach the characteristics of their particular civilization. National ideals are lived and sensed through the contacts of every day. In a nation like ours,

however, made up not only of individuals of very great as well as of very humble native ability, but also of representatives of every nation of the earth, of whom 16 per cent are foreign born and over 30 per cent either foreign born or of foreign parentage, the problem takes on new difficulties. An additional complication lies in the very rapid influx of foreigners in recent years at a rate which quickly exceeded our assimilative capacity and has left us with monstrous accumulated problems of racial antagonism, industrial maladjustment, and educational responsibility which have bid fair to overwhelm us. The census of 1920 shows that of the foreign born over ten years of age in this country 3,000,000 cannot speak English and 1,650,000 cannot read or write in any language. The Army Intelligence Tests found 7 per cent of the white draft wholly illiterate and 25 per cent relatively illiterate. These figures give some idea of the magnitude of the problem of passing on American ideals to individuals to whom English words, written or spoken, convey no meaning. The acquisition of understandings through daily contact in living and doing with the older Americans is also denied our newer immigrants because of their habit of living and working in segregated groups.

We cannot wander much through our bigger cities without an uneasy consciousness that the fire under the melting pot must have markedly cooled of late years, for the pot seems full of ugly and menacing lumps, preserving all the characteristics of the veins from which the ore was originally mined and showing no evidence of even marginal fusing.

But if we set upon our great task of making fellow-citizens, co-inheritors with us, of these people whom we have allowed to come into our midst, what of our formulated and unformulated traditions, the priceless gifts of the past, must we hand on to them and teach to their children and ours in order to keep alive for humanity that which is dear to us in the democratic experiment? We shall go on as a people, either under a developing leadership to heights never yet scaled by man, or through failing leadership back to more primitive forms of society. Whichever way we turn, whatever our destination, will democracy be able to offer us ideals by which we can find our way to a fairer and happier life for all?

I

Our government is a government by the people as a whole, whether it follows in the future the representative form given us by the early constitution builders or works out in ways of more direct control by the voters. The fundamental demand such a government makes upon its citizens is an acceptance of the principle that the will of the majority must prevail. This implies no denial of the right of the minority to alter the will of the majority by any method of moral or intellectual persuasion, but it does imply an obligation on the part of every citizen to accede to the majority will until the process of re-education or conversion is completed. The ostensible democracies in countries in which an election is usually followed by a revolution are obviously, by virtue of that very fact, not entitled to the name of democracy.

There are times when to the minority the rule of the majority seems to mean as ruthless a tyranny as that of any czar, though the principle of the right of the majority will to prevail does not exclude the rights of the minority to due representation and to personal liberty. Of all forms of society which have so far been tried out, that seems the fairest in which the larger proportion of the population makes the decision in matters susceptible to choice. Certainly more people are satisfied in this type of organization than in any other. The degree of civilization of a nation is measured, however, by the safeguards thrown round the minority. Their rights are not necessarily jeopardized by the granting of the right to the majority to rule. The minority may convert enough of the majority to their way of thinking to swing the pendulum the other way and make the principle that seemed to enslave them so long as they belonged to the minority group create them masters as tribute to their superior powers of persuasion. But even though the composition of the minority group might vary, there would always be groups outside the arena of political control. Proportional representation, which has been evoked as the salvation of the minority, serves merely to permit the registering of a protest vote or to offer a more strategic position from which to launch campaigns of conversion. For that perfect justice to all elements in a community towards

which we aim we must supplement an acceptance of the right of the majority will to be supreme. We must not only combine with it a recognition of our responsibility to the minority, but we must adopt additional ideals and standards to insure that equality of opportunity which is the main justification for the creation of a democratic society.

II

Lincoln, who has written so many pages of the Bible of Democracy, said, "For a man to violate the law is to tear the charter of his own and his children's liberty."

An observer, at a trial of those ordered deported after the World War, might well have been overcome by what he saw and heard. He need not have been stirred by sympathy for the deportees, many of whom were potential citizens of a low order of desirability, but he could not have failed to be filled with consternation at the assault upon his own and his children's liberties involved in the ruthless overriding of constitutional rights by the officers of the law.

"Is it possible," he might have asked himself, "that in this twentieth century and in this so-called land of liberty and law those primal rights of men to immunity from search or arrest without warrant, to trial by jury, to representation by counsel, to freedom of speech and assembly, rights for which thousands have sacrificed their lives through the centuries, are subject to the whim of a Department of Justice, to be disregarded in any crisis the controlling group in the Government considers critical?"

To one who has allowed himself to believe that these doctrines of the rights of the individual are fundamental to any theory of government, such setting at naught seems cataclysmic. He is almost persuaded that there must have been some shift in our educational background or some alteration in the development of our traditions. How otherwise can these established safeguards of liberty have ceased to carry authority with those chosen to protect us? Whether the action in that crisis represented any drift away from democratic ideals is to be questioned. The whole perturbation was probably a minor oscillation from the perpendicular due to war hysteria, but it none the less revealed

an astonishing indifference on the part of the officers of the law to the law itself. If such a group, sworn to uphold the law, disregards it at will or uses it as a cloak for the carrying out of ulterior purposes, is it any wonder that the ordinary citizen, to whom the rules of community life seem often merely irritating or an unwarranted infringement of his personal liberty, heeds them only when he is compelled to? And yet it takes only a slight effort of the intelligence to see that respect for the law is the only hope for the safety of any of us. It is not always easy for the victim of the law, which we know is often only a crude and imperfect approximation to justice, to recognize its fundamental beneficence. Yet evil as it is that the innocent should perish by the law, is it not at least as evil that the guilty should escape in defiance of the law?

The citizen, when he first takes out his automobile license, is oppressed by the number of rules and regulations of which he is expected to become the intelligent repository. He uneasily looks upon advancing civilization, as it affects him and his automobile, as a device for robbing him of still more of his few remaining liberties. But when he takes his car on the crowded thoroughfares and sees the traffic policeman, by the use of those very rules and regulations, disentangling the chaos of automobiles, he realizes that the regulations are the guarantee of his liberty and that without them he would not be able to get through the streets at all. Law itself he recognizes as an expression of the effort of the community as a whole to protect, in the midst of the crushing complexities of modern life, the individual in his innocent and legitimate activities. He will find that it is only when his liberty infringes that of another individual that the law purposes to interfere with him.

What renders the final indecencies of John Barleycorn so unpleasant is not the noxious effect of the wood and other alcohols, but the moral obliquity involved in the flaunting by citizens of the Constitution and laws. Often the very individuals who have benefited most from the stabilizing influence of courts and constitutions upon the community life are the flagrant offenders. Bootlegging among the unassimilated foreigners and the criminal classes is bad enough, but the fact that customers are plenty

among the prosperous and professional classes is the deplorable and menacing aftermath of the Eighteenth Amendment.

We are regarded among nations as a lawless people. If we cannot put away an attitude so characteristic of racial childhood, our feet are as surely set on the broad path of destruction as those of the undisciplined boy who knows no will but his own.

III

It is not enough to teach our people to accede to the will of the majority and to respect the law. We must weave into the very texture of their moral attitude a tolerance for other men's opinions. We may never be able to train our fellow citizens to enjoy differences, but we can teach them to be aware of the fact that differences will exist until there is left but one survivor of the human race. It would be a dull world indeed if we all saw eye to eye with each other. What a stimulus to our intellectual life would come from a recognition of the value to ourselves of our critics and opponents. If the lions and lambs of the mind could but lie down together!

Periodically we comfort ourselves with the reflection that at last in this country we have achieved religious tolerance. Then the old brutal bigotries emerge, first in one religious group and then in another, and we realize afresh that the battle has to be continually refought and the victory perpetually rewon. In theory religious freedom is an accepted article of our political creed, but like all articles of any creed it must be reiterated and retaught to the novitiates of our democracy. Unless we can accomplish this our country ceases to be the home of the free spirit and the refuge of the oppressed.

If we were asked whether we regarded racial differences and diverse types of civilization as an enrichment of the life of man on earth, there are few who would say no. But personally and individually a graceful recognition of the right of others to think differently about things with which we are really concerned makes moral demands upon us of a high order. Our present battleground is in the industrial field. We show a militant reluctance to allow free lances to cross the land and have to exercise real self-restraint to refrain from erecting no-trespass-

ing signs at the Debatable Fords. Yet unless we are able to achieve victory here as elsewhere over the natural conservatism of human nature, our chances for progress are slight. We shall be as hard put to as the White Queen to keep just where we are, to say nothing of accumulating enough momentum to go ahead. Not every new idea is good, but every advance is in response to the stimulus of a new idea or an old one in new clothing. No one, save a madman, would claim that we had anywhere established the perfect society. One of the main advantages of democracy as a form of government is its adaptability to progress, for it is designed to register the changing ideals of its citizens. It is a peculiar responsibility of the believer in democracy to keep the paths open to new ideas, even though he must admit the bad with the good. In no other way can he hope that a way may be found out of the labyrinth of complexities in which twentieth century civilization finds itself.

With all our determination to be openminded, to be fair to all points of view, we have a task of peculiar difficulty in dealing with the foreign born. At the same time that we must beware of opposing or ignoring the standards and preconceptions the immigrant brings with him, we must impress upon him our national ideals. If the immigrants were here in small numbers, scattered through the population, they could be trusted to become in time an understanding part of our citizenry, but the presence of the large segregated groups make heavy demands upon our intelligence and our respect for the inevitable racial differences. People cannot be herded into new social and political attitudes. Changes that alter one's outlook upon life, that change one's relations to individuals and institutions, are acquired, not in classes for Americanization, but through transforming processes inaccessible to the influence of propaganda. The one salvation of the situation is the spirit in which the immigrants come to America as to the Promised Land. The majority are eager to adopt our language and customs. They wish to become an integral part of the population, to be indistinguishable from other "Americans". This eagerness to adopt the background color immediately, desirable as it is for future amalgamation, often forces the potential citizen through an interval of

spiritual desert. The old ideals fall from him, the old shibboleths cease to exercise authority, long before he has found opportunity or developed capacity to recognize the new. This entails a period of unlovely materialism, cheap ideals and often asocial conduct.

No civilization worthy of the name can be a patchwork quilt, with pretty colors added here and there. We do not expect to add to our institutions the harem of Turkey, or the tribal organization of the Berber, or the juridical methods of the Tong and the Mafia. Our civilization is an organic structure, adapted one part to another. Such variations and improvements as are to be made must have some regard to the original architecture and some consideration of the strength of the structural parts and the load-bearing capacity of amalgam. The more promptly our new citizens throw off the beliefs that keep them apart from the rest of us, the sooner they can begin to make their individual and characteristic contribution to the bettering of our civilization. Nevertheless there is upon us a special responsibility to help the immigrant through that transition, with delicate respect for the ideals which we ask him to give up at the same time that we press upon him the ideals which we hope he will in time feel are closer and dearer to him than those he has surrendered. No social concepts which do not imply this tolerance are entitled to or can expect to win allegiance from the men and women who come here to help us build up a righteous and enduring civilization.

IV

The Russian Bolsheviks cry out against a democracy like ours, which they denounce as the tool of the capitalist class. To their minds the irrefutable evidence of this is our national habit of proceeding in our social reforms one step at a time. Theirs is an all-or-nothing doctrine to which we, more experienced both in the difficulties and the possibilities of living bearably together, cannot subscribe. Our imaginations are too seasoned to get much comfort from the idea of a complete turnover, however exhilarating such a picture might be to the revolutionist. Whatever curse may be upon us at any time, capitalistic tyranny or the throttling grip of the trade union, our natural method of getting rid of it is

not by capsizing the State, but by working out checks and balances to offset the evil and still retain some good in living for the rest of us. Nor is our governmental machinery entirely without devices to enable us to do this, however the Bolsheviks may decry it. The most complete answer that could be made to such critics of our democracy was given in the victory of the Non-Partisan League in North Dakota. Whatever the soundness or unsoundness of that party's theory of government or the success or failure of the experiments it has tried, its coming into power has afforded an example of the possibilities of radical alterations of method within the democracy, dependent solely upon a conversion of a majority of the voters to any proposed changes. Nothing much more radical was tried in Russia; the chief distinction was the substitution of ballots for bayonets in the Dakota adventure. Such limitations as there are to the complete control of our affairs by any party, limitations imposed by the constitution guaranteeing the rights of the individual, would find critics only among the "tender-minded" of Professor James's classification. The protection of the individual and the safeguarding of his freedom of speech and conduct are the assurance of those very liberties which make progress possible.

The fundamental difference between the Bolshevik method and the democratic is the difference between the practice of the methods of revolution and of the methods of evolution. Faith in the endless possibilities of political evolution is a traditional American faith. If it is to persist, those who do not carry the belief as a racial inheritance must be trained in its tenets until they become ingrained. Unless our people accept this political faith, and unless we remove every impediment to peaceful change and alteration, revolution may inevitably overtake us. At best revolution is a tragedy. From its ruins some structure must be built up to hold and express the new society. Why then pass through the horrors of revolution in the transit? The chaos of the overturn is not a necessary prelude to the new construction. All it can ever achieve is a change of mind; and a civilization, designed to make that a daily possibility, should be proof against the hysteria of the revolutionist. A respect for evolution as a political method must become the very form of our thinking,

strange and alien though it may seem to the unaccustomed minds of some of our immigrants, or democracy goes down in failure.

V

A civilization built up on a theory of equality of opportunity, designed to do without a caste system or hereditary classes, able to contemplate with equanimity the three-generation transition from shirt sleeves to shirt sleeves, must hold as one of its chief articles of faith a profound respect for the dignity of labor. Every function performed in a democratic society, whether it so exists in the consciousness of the performer or not, is a service to the community as a whole, independent of the loss or gain to the individual himself. Human contributions are rightly measured, not by the financial reward given or received, but in terms of social gain, the degree of service rendered. Such an evaluation eliminates any moral distinction between the contribution of labor and capital, or between the manual and the brain worker, the mechanic and the manager.

The capitalist who boasts of himself as a philanthropist because he gives work to a thousand men is the naïve expositor of an ancient and long-since discarded economic theory. He ignores the fact that without these men to convert crude substances into finished products his capital represents just so much junk. The workmen might equally claim that they were philanthropists in turning his raw materials into marketable goods. On the other hand the laborer's contention that, because his work is done with his hands and the capitalist's with his savings, there is a moral gulf between the two, is equally unsound. The difference between the two contributions may be merely one of time. The capitalist may be one who amassed his capital in earlier years by the work of his hand or brain and is now utilizing in further production that which he abstained from spending. The capitalist, in spite of all the connotation of excessive wealth the word brings to the lay mind, is not the bloated creature of the popular cartoon, clutching his money bags, but is you or I with that hundred dollars we put in the bank against the emergency of a rainy day. Are we by that very act more iniquitous than the loafer who earns nothing or the spendthrift who saves nothing?

VI

We must train our citizens to respect many ideals and abstractions at the cost perhaps of great pain to themselves, but there is one human ideal above all which they must respect if our civilization is to do more than merely mark time. In so far as we are able to define it and in so far as we are capable of recognizing it we must hold truth in the highest honor. Truth is man's formulation of the actualities of life, freed to the extent of his critical ability from the distortion incident to its transfer through a fallible human mind. The votaries of truth are under a double compulsion: they must be intelligent enough to know the truth when they see it; and they must be courageous enough to act upon it when they have mastered it. Most of us muddle through life without sufficient sharpness of intellect to discriminate between the true and the false, but the minds of those marked by the gods to lead in the advance of the race are of a quality "defenseless against the truth". These minds, flooded by the great realities that lie about them, reveal the truth, but look to us to act upon their findings. How often we are found unworthy of the trust!

Many a truth is kept without the pale because it fails to fit in comfortably with our favorite preconceptions. The warfare between science and religion has a long history and one that is not yet ended. Nor is revealed religion the only enemy of truth. Economists and pseudo-economists cling to their fallacies. That a proper wage is not an actual sum of money but a relation between producing ability and the buying power of an artificial medium of exchange, is a truth that is hard for the employee to appreciate on a falling market and the employer on a rising market. The conviction that alcohol is a stimulant has, in the minds of many, survived by many years the laboratory demonstration of its fallaciousness. That every disease has its antidotal herb or drug is a belief that fills the coffers of the apothecaries and is proof against the continued discrediting of it by science. And yet an ability to recognize truth and to guide conduct by its light is of vital importance to the sovereigns of a democracy whose will is law and the findings of whose intelligence decide the ways of life for us all.

Some European wit has said that truth-telling is an invention of the English. There are some Europeans who convince us that the invention must have been patented in London for home consumption only. Governments may be workable on a basis of personal and official indifference to veracity in racial groups that have their own code of truth-telling and know through generations of experience how much salt to add to each other's statements.

But in a country like ours, a blend of races representing all degrees of veracity from zero up, the only practical way out may have to be an educational and social insistence on the truth and nothing but the truth. Though this bids fair to remove many of the ameliorations from political and private life, we find it hard to know where to draw the line. We can hardly teach our young citizens that they may lie at home and with their fellows but must cultivate the truth only in their civic relations. Even at the risk of introducing a certain bleakness into our personal life, the gain in stability in our public life would more than compensate.

We might entirely discount truth-telling as a moral virtue, we might let it go the way of card-playing, dancing, and Sunday base-ball as an activity entirely removed from the category of sins, and yet be reluctant to see it go, so obvious are its practical advantages. To walk always on firm ground, not to be constantly braced against the possibility of the foundation giving way, would be an economic as well as a moral gain. Undoubtedly one of the primary difficulties in our municipal politics is the great inequality in veraciousness among the different racial groups. The truth-tellers are at a marked disadvantage. They are apt to be early detected as such, but are themselves reluctant to suspect an evasion of the truth on the part of their critics or opponents.

This might serve as an argument for achieving an equality in evasiveness, but that presents the prospect of an impossible competition with no end in sight. For the dignity of our lives as citizens of the great democracy, as well as for the dignity of our personal lives, let us put away childish things and adopt a national habit of truth-seeking and truth-telling.

If we contrast the intelligence of a country, such as France for instance, in the thirteenth century and to-day, we see no evidence that the actual capacity or content of the mind has greatly altered. What we do perceive is that there has been a substitution of truth for error in many of the divisions of human thought and experience. The main distinction between France under the Capetians and under Millerand and Poincaré is not the different minds of the Frenchmen of the two periods but the different thoughts they are thinking. This is the major achievement of the six hundred years. Part of the change is due to the searcher for truth who has enlarged the realm of the known: part of it is due to the educators who have endeavored to admit to this realm more and more individuals of each generation. This we may ask of education, and perhaps no more; not that she give all the truth to each of us, but that she everywhere substitute truth for error within the bounds of what it is possible for us to know.

Our hope lies in being released from the despotism of the untrue, from the terrible fears and apprehensions to which our ignorance of the facts of existence has left us an easy prey throughout our long history on earth. A democracy which has for its function the freeing of the individual for service must free him not alone from the tyranny of kings but from the tyranny of half-knowledge, the fatal incompleteness, which has been our heritage from the day of that interrupted feast of Adam and Eve "whence cometh all our woe".

Lincoln's faith in the common man was based, not on his admiration for his intellect but on his conviction that in the great moral issues the judgment of the man in the street was sound, less subject than that of his social or intellectual superiors to perturbing secondary considerations and so truer to the heart of the problem. These were indeed the people who revolted against the iniquity of slavery, and early in the World War determined the national attitude of condemnation of the German outrages. It is such people who rise up periodically in our communities, throw out the forces of corruption and take back their own. They give meaning to the theory of democracy. Their existence is the real justification for the creation of democracies. It is

to the people, "that great multitude through whom speaks the Voice of the Almighty Power that makes for righteousness," we must give trusteeship for the irreplaceable treasures of the democratic ideals: respect for the will of the majority and the rights of the minority; respect for the law; respect for other men's opinions and beliefs; respect for the processes of evolution as against those of revolution; respect for the dignity of labor; and respect for the truth.

A nation which cherishes and protects with its last ounce of strength the sacred contents of this Ark of the Covenant is safeguarded from the worst dangers that beset the builders of a people's government.

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